

**Date** : 8 December 2024  
**Theme** : Making your election sure  
**Topic** : Resolving differences and edifying one another  
**Key passage**: Romans 14  
**Key verse** : Romans 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

## Introduction

The church is a diverse body, made up of believers who come from different cultural, racial and social backgrounds, each with unique traditions and experiences. Some believers may have recently come to Christ, while others may have a long history of faith, and possibly influenced by previous church environments. This diversity enriches the church but can also lead to misunderstandings, particularly on matters of personal conviction and liberty.

Romans 14 addresses how believers should navigate differences over disputable matters—issues not explicitly addressed as sin or righteousness in Scripture. While our freedom in Christ allows us to make choices in such areas, this liberty must always be exercised with love and consideration for others.

### 1. Problem: Disputes over doubtful things.

“Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.” Romans 14:1 (NKJV)

Paul begins Romans 14 by acknowledging that disputes can arise over "doubtful things". Doubtful things are areas that Scripture does not give a clear command or prohibition, so believers have different reasoning or opinions. These disputes often create tension within the church.

#### a. What are doubtful things and what are not?

- i. Doubtful things are those areas where Scripture allows for personal conviction and discretion:
  - Food: Eating food offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8) or food with blood
  - Drinks: Alcohol consumption, where moderation versus abstinence is debated.
  - Days: Observing Levitical festivals as per the Old Testament laws.
  - Modern examples: Tattoos, hairstyles, clothing styles, music, videos, games, dancing, stock market.
- ii. Non-doubtful things are core doctrinal truths and moral commands clearly outlined in Scripture
  - Gospel truth: The existence of God, the problem of sin and death, salvation only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
  - Moral laws e.g. 10 commandments – prohibitions against lying, stealing, adultery, and covetousness.
  - Spiritual / occultic practices: Halloween (celebrates death and demons), Yoga (traces its roots to Hindu worship), etc.

## **b. Why should we not judge one another?**

- i. God has accepted all believers regardless of their faith journey. Who are we to judge and condemn another? Or shall we despise the other and look down on those who are more cautious or restrictive? (v1,3)
- ii. Jesus is able to make us stand before him because He is the ultimate master (v4). By His death and resurrection, Jesus became our Saviour and Lord, now interceding for us (Romans 8:34) and sanctifies us in our journey of faith. (v9)
- iii. Each believer must give an account to God. Our focus should be on our personal walk with Christ, rather than frequently looking at the speck in another believer's eyes. (v12, Matthew 7:3)

## **2. Solution – Principles of handling doubtful things.**

Even though ceremonial laws have been made obsolete by the Lord, the Lord also judges us by our conscience. A believer who considers something as unclean but chose to go against it, sins against God. (v14,23).

- a. **Act** only in faith and with good conscience. (v23)
  - i. When in doubt about a decision, refrain from doing it otherwise it will constitute as sin.
- b. **Be** fully convinced in my own mind about the doubtful things. (v5)
  - i. What does the scripture say about them?
  - ii. Will my actions have an appearance of evil? (1 Thessalonians 5:22-24)
  - iii. Is my action wise? Will it be beneficial or harmful for ourselves and others? (1 Corinthians 6:12)
  - iv. Will my actions violate my conscience? (v23)
- c. **Commit** my life daily to live for the Lord and glorify Him. (v8)
  - i. Will my actions please or displease God?
  - ii. Will my actions draw people nearer to God or drive them away from God?
- d. **Decide** never to stumble or destroy my fellow travellers. v13
  - i. Will my actions causing another believer to be distressed is not acting in love.
  - ii. Causing another to go against his conscience causes him to sin.

## **3. Principles governing our relationships in church. (v13 – 23)**

### **a. Practice caution in regards to personal liberty**

Our Christian liberty is not a license to indulge without regard for others.

- i. Do not put any stumbling block that cause another believer to fall in his/her faith. (v13,21)
- ii. Do not destroy another believer for whom Christ died. (v15)
- iii. Do not destroy the work of God in the believers' journey of faith. (v20)

**b. Practice self-denial to avoid causing fellow believers to fall. (v21)**

For example:

- i. Alcohol: Not be the stumbling block that trigger others into addiction.
- ii. Revealing clothes: Dressing modestly to prevent others from struggling with lust or distraction.
- iii. Choice of digital content: Because we become by what enters our eyes, ears and minds and we share these with others too.
  - Especially Netflix, Tik-Tokers, YouTubers, music and singers (e.g. Ed Sheeran), games.
  - Not conform to their patterns just because they are funny, entertaining and popular. Their patterns can cause believers to adopt worldly values and normalize sinful behaviour.
  - In languages: idle words (e.g. damn, luck), harsh words (e.g. pissed) profanities (e.g., saying “f” in substitution of the full word, s\*\*\*), cursing the name of God and Jesus).
  - In values and character: highly sexualized, instant gratification instead of patience and self-control, unwise spending instead of being frugal, pleasure and entertainment become our god (hedonism) and neglect responsibilities and living productive lives.

Think not to conform to the patterns of the world, but to conform into the image of Jesus. (Romans 12:2, Romans 8:29)

- Think instead what is noble, pure, lovely, praiseworthy. (Philippians 4:8)
- Think Jesus: will he do the same? Will he like it or dislike it? Will he approve or disapprove it?
- Consider alternatives that edify others.

**c. Purpose ourselves in church to build others and to pursue peace.**

Church is not simply a gathering of people to hang out or passively waiting for things to happen. God has personally placed each one of us in the body of Jesus (the church), and given us the purpose to play our parts and to build others (1 Corinthians 12:18)

- i. Welcome those who are less mature in God’s Word. (v1)  
Teach them patiently and gently, avoid criticism or shaming.
- ii. Discuss doubtful matters peacefully  
Engage in conversations with love and respect, refraining from quarrels over non-essential issues.
- iii. Serve Christ in His way. (v18)  
Let our service be rooted in righteousness, peace and joy, reflecting Christ’s character. Be the servant of God who thoroughly equipped, through the Scriptures, for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- iv. Focus on what matters in the Kingdom of God.

**Application**

1. Identify some topics of discussion with fellow believers or family members that has caused tension.

2. In what areas do you need to change in the way you ...

- Speak to those who hold strong views, e.g. about drinking liquor and clothing styles.
- Handle personal liberty in order to avoid stumbling other believers.